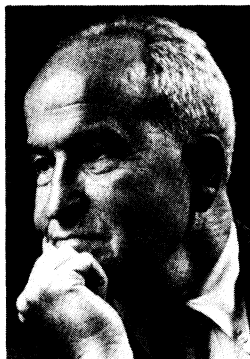


HENRY A. MURRAY (1893-1988): Humanistic Psychologist

M. BREWSTER SMITH



HENRY A. MURRAY

Summary

Henry A. (Harry) Murray, organizer and primary author of *Explorations in Personality* (Murray et al., 1938) and, with his long-time partner and collaborator Christiana Morgan, deviser of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), was a humanistic psychologist on the grand scale. Since he felt alienated from the irrationalistic, antiscientific aspects of the humanistic psychology movement when it became substantially captured by the counterculture of the 1960s, and therefore limited his participation, probably rather few participants in humanistic psychology

remember that along with other major figures in the founding generation of American personality psychology (Allport, Murphy, and Kelly), Murray was part of the Old Saybrook Conference of 1964 that launched the so-called Third Force of humanistic psychology. His name remained on the masthead of this journal until his death on June 23, 1988.

To those who knew him, Harry Murray was an Olympian figure. His active career spanned the middle half of the twentieth century. Murray was a valid successor to William James with whom he identified—a humanist in psychology in the sense of attunement

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Adapted with little change from Smith (1982), this was my contribution to a symposium (Shneidman et al., 1982) celebrating the publication of Shneidman's edition of Murray's major psychological writings (Shneidman, 1981). I have also drawn on the obituary I wrote with James Anderson for the *American Psychologist* (Smith & Anderson, 1989). I am grateful to the Society for Personality and Social Psychology and to James Anderson and the American Psychological Association for their courtesy in letting me reuse this material.

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to the richness of human experience and to the insights to be discovered in great literature and the arts; and Murray shared with James a felicitous command of language. His Jamesian commitments led him into continual battle with the objectivist, positivistic psychology of the mainstream. His colleague at Harvard and supporter in that battle, but sparring partner in the formulation and analysis of personality, Gordon Allport, gave personality its first great book (Allport, 1937). In the following year, *Explorations in Personality* by Murray and his co-workers (Murray et al., 1938) got the field fairly launched. Allport presented a psychology of the mature ego and its development. Murray's "personology" (to use his preferred term for the psychology of personality) was a psychodynamic depth psychology, drawing on Freud, Jung, and (as substantially but less explicitly) William McDougall.

Henry Alexander Murray was born May 13, 1893, in a comfortable New York City brownstone, to a well-to-do, conservative family, and had an upper-class upbringing on the Eastern seaboard. After preparing at Groton School, he went to Harvard, where he concentrated in history as an undistinguished student but had his real achievement in heading the varsity crew. He attended medical school at Columbia University and found himself serious about his studies for the first time. After his first year of medical school he married Josephine Rantoul, from a Boston Brahmin family. They later had one child, Josephine Murray, who today is a pediatrician in Boston. Murray received an MD degree, as well as an MA in biology, from Columbia and completed a 20-month surgical internship at Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. During his internship he had the memorable experience of helping care for Franklin D. Roosevelt while the future President was undergoing his courageous struggle with polio. Murray then spent four years doing research on physiological ontogeny, studying chicken embryos at the Rockefeller Institute. He continued his research at Cambridge University, where he received his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1927—an extraordinary background for a founder of personality psychology!

During these years Murray experienced a major inner upheaval. In 1923 he read Carl Jung's *Psychological Types*, just published in English translation, which "came to him as a gratuitous answer to an unspoken prayer." He was captured by the writings of the tragic, alienated Herman Melville. He also began a deep emotional and

intellectual life partnership with Christiana Drummond Morgan, an intuitive and artistic woman already adept in Jungian psychology, a partnership that was somehow complexly compatible with his good marriage. In 1925 he spent three intense weeks with Jung, during which psychological depths opened out for him.

Murray looked at 1925 as the year of his rebirth. He returned to America bent on combining medical and academic psychology. Although he had had no formal education in psychology whatsoever, he was appointed in 1927 as Morton Prince's assistant in the newly formed Harvard Psychological Clinic. Prince, a prominent Boston psychiatrist in the non-Freudian tradition of French psychopathology, failed in health the following year, and Murray became a candidate to succeed him. There was much concern among Harvard's psychologists over Murray's suitability for the position, but President A. Lawrence Lowell made the appointment on the advice of the physiologist L. J. Henderson with whom Murray had worked, and Murray never moderated his expressions of disdain for what he considered to be the scientism of much of academic psychology as he encountered it then and subsequently. Surely his security as economically independent and as already firmly established in hard-nosed biological science played a part in making his maverick role in psychology possible.

Convinced that the academic psychology of the day was misguided, Murray made every effort to learn about psychoanalysis. He helped found the Boston Psychoanalytic Society in 1928, had a nine-month training analysis with Franz Alexander in 1931-1932, saw control cases under the supervision of Hanns Sachs, and became a member of the American Psychoanalytic Association in 1933. After these experiences he concluded that psychoanalysis had much explanatory power, but, he noted, "This is no reason for going in blind and swallowing the whole indigestible bolus. . . . No; I, for one, prefer to take what I please, suspend judgment, reject what I please, speak freely" (Shneidman, 1981, p. 296. All subsequent quotations from Murray give page references to this volume).

At the Harvard Psychological Clinic, Murray assembled a stellar group of students and colleagues. Catalyzing around him as he always did an atmosphere of collective exuberant creativity, he launched the path-setting research program that in 1938 resulted in *Explorations in Personality* (Murray et al., 1938). *Explorations* presented at length Murray's dynamic, proactive conception of

personality as the study of lives and his elaborate taxonomy of needs and press for the characterization of persons and their human transactions. In chapters by the many collaborators, the book also presented a variety of separate studies of personological topics—all carried out, designedly, on the same 51, paid, college-age subjects. The appearance of *Explorations* secured Murray's position as the leader in the systematic, holistic, dynamic study of personality and in the interpretation of imaginative productions as a major route to its understanding.

During the period of *Explorations*, Murray, with the help of Christiana Morgan and other colleagues, created the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). He was irritated in later years that many people thought of him only in connection with the TAT. But the TAT was the perfect expression of his approach to the study of personality; it provides access to the "deeper, blinder strata" (p. 60) (Murray quoted James to the effect that individuality is founded in feeling, thus rooted); it brings out the individual's creative and complex self-understanding, and it is resistant to reductionistic analysis.

After the war, in which Murray organized an assessment program for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency, to select cloak-and-dagger agents, he returned to Harvard. In 1947, at the age of 54, he finally received tenure as a lecturer, being named Professor of Clinical Psychology only in 1951. He was a central participant in the formation of Harvard's interdisciplinary Department of Social Relations, which, beginning in 1946, combined the approaches of clinical and social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology until it was merged with the Department of Psychology in 1972. In that connection he formed a productive intellectual collaboration with the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, with whom he edited and partly authored a classic text of the culture-and-personality movement, *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture* (Kluckhohn & Murray, 1948). The American Psychological Association finally honored him with its Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award in 1961, and the American Psychological Foundation gave him its gold medal in 1969.

Although he had a strong historical sense and his collaboration with Kluckhohn left him keenly aware of the psychological importance of cultural differences, Murray was not troubled by the

qualms of relativism that tended to paralyze many of his contemporaries. He was not impressed or deterred by the gulf between scientific facts and human values, which he treated as potentially concordant. In any case, there is no question about Murray's priorities, which place human values first, in the spirit of Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." In the context of describing his conception of humanistic religion, to which I will recur, he wrote:

Certainly in my scales the ultimate concern of man is man himself, the development toward perfection of his inner being, the development toward perfection of his interpersonal relationships, the development toward perfection of his societies, and eventually the creation and maintenance of a harmonious world community, in short, better personalities for a better life for a better world, the highest spiritual good for all men and women of this earth. . . . To put *in a nutshell* the science-religion relationship as I order it: It is the development of science for the development of man, rather than the development of man for the development of science. (p. 582)

In a word, Murray's humanism was a scientific humanism, and his personology was in intention and in fact a humanistic science.

Over the years, considerations of world loyalty took higher priority, as Murray saw with clarity and steadfast concern the horrible probabilities in a world of contending nationalisms armed with weapons of ultimate destructiveness.

I have come to believe that nothing is of signal significance today save those thoughts and actions which, in some measure, purpose to contribute to the diagnosis and alleviation of the global neurosis which so affects us. There will be no freedom for any exuberant form of life, in my estimation, without freedom from atomic war; and no freedom from war without a democratic world government and police force; and no world government without a radical conversion and reeducation of thousands of personalities in the light of a new conception, synthesis of Eastern and Western wisdom. . . . Present conditions are so extremely unfavorable [to such a development] . . . that we would be well advised to prepare our sinews for a long and protracted era of ferocity and anguish until our devils are subdued and our eyes opened. (pp. 613-614)

Murray wrote those words for Edward R. Murrow's column, "This I Believe," sometime in the early 1950s. Could they be more cogent today?

In the topical phrasing of the moment, Harry Murray is a prototypical specimen of what Jerry Falwell and other "prime-time

preachers" (Hadden & Swann, 1981) decried as "secular humanism," which from their fundamentalist position is the Evil Enemy. Murray could very well be the standard-bearer for those of us who would proudly declare ourselves as secular humanists (Smith 1986). The case, as he articulates it, is typical of Murray, congruent with the essential features of his personology.

In the first place, Murray's variant of secular humanism is explicitly and genuinely religious in the dual sense that it is concerned with ultimate values and involved with mythic thought of unconscious origin to lend weight and sensed validity to its living human truths. Central to Murray's religious vision is human participation in the imminent creativity of evolutionary and developmental process. (Here he draws on Bergson's version of "creative evolution.") So he poses a direct challenge to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which assigns all creativity to a transcendent Creator. In our day, as Murray sees it, Christianity stultifies the religious imagination (p. 600). It is also inadequate in other ways to our needs and our understanding: In its focus on an authoritarian father-son relation, its assumptions about family relations and of man-God relations are humanly demeaning. It is sexist, committed to the patriarchy. It is prejudiced against sexual love and generativity, the very paradigm of creative polarity and interpersonal care. It recurs to the Augustinian view of sinful human nature, rather than appropriately recognizing people's multivalent potentialities. It looks to repression to deal with evil motives. It is all too ready to visit damnation and eternal torture—and worldly harm—on the deviant, the Outsider, the non-Elect. A strong indictment, congruent with Murray's humanism and with his personology!

In his Harvard Phi Beta Kappa address (1959), "Beyond Yesterday's Idealisms" (pp. 605-612), Murray took the role of a modern John the Baptist, calling for a truly *new* testament, a new poetic-mythic, compelling vision to engage the spirit of all humankind. It is still an inspiring vision, a sociotherapeutic prescription befitting his physician's diagnosis "to account for the greater part of the widespread desperation of our time": "an emotional deficiency disease, a paralysis of the creative imagination, an addiction to superficials" (p. 608). It is no criticism of Murray that three decades later the American condition of emotional deficiency is more rife than ever, and at least in the short run, those who are

proffering Messianic answers to our planetary cultural crisis are reviving the authoritarian tones of Christian fundamentalism and giving aid and comfort to those who are escalating the prospects of nuclear war.

Of course, there are ways in which Murray's phrasing of the larger meanings so firmly in his grasp was unavoidably time-bound. We have our own newer versions of systems theory instead of the organicism of Murray's friend, Alfred North Whitehead, and for a number of us, one or another version of dialectical thinking replaces the Bergsonian idea of emergent evolution. These are differences that make no difference to the continued cogency of Murray's contribution to matters of the broadest and deepest human significance.

Murray's version of secular humanism was the worldview of a whole person, of a thoughtful, imaginative person, of a magnanimous, self-respecting person. It was the view of a psychologist who saw human potentiality and actuality in their complex multivalence, who combined a sense of the mythic and nonrational with a keen and steady eye for tough realities that contemporary culture conspires to help most people ignore or misconstrue.

The vaunted launching of humanistic psychology as a Third Force could hardly have been very special or newsworthy for Harry Murray. All along he had been *doing* humanistic psychology of an imaginative, solid, and well-considered kind. But he shared no common ground with the countercultural, antiscientific version of the humanistic movement that followed. The recent revival of interest in Murray's personology is also potentially the renaissance of a humanistic psychology that is conceived as human science. Such a revived humanistic psychology/personology can find continuing sustenance in Murray's ideas.

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Reprint requests: M. Brewster Smith, Adlai Stevenson College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064.